

ABSTRACT

THE INTEGRATION OF THE SUSTAINABILITY CONCEPT WITH THE MARKETING CURRICULUM: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY BASED ON POLISH PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

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Purpose

In the business world, marketing is unavoidable in achieving corporate financial objectives by satisfying existing and potential customers. However, focusing solely on financial objectives through marketing is insufficient in the contemporary context due to the growing concern about social and environmental issues worldwide. Therefore, modern corporations should have a broader responsibility beyond just meeting shareholder returns on investment, and focus on a broader horizon to achieve triple bottom-line results. Accordingly, marketing decision-makers in corporations should possess sustainability marketing competencies that complement traditional marketing competencies to contribute to achieving triple-bottom-line results through the marketing function. In this context, universities, as centres for excellence in marketing higher education and research, have a role in transforming and developing their existing marketing curricula into sustainability-oriented marketing curricula to develop future marketing decision-makers' sustainability marketing competencies. When considering the Polish context, the research gaps identified as a lack of scientific explanation regarding the relationship between the sustainability concept integration into the marketing curriculum and the students' competencies related to the sustainability marketing mix. Moreover, there was a lack of exploration regarding the management students' knowledge, skills and attitudes towards the sustainability marketing mix. Therefore, the ultimate purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the sustainability concept integration into the marketing curriculum and the students' competencies related to the sustainability marketing mix under the neo-institutional theory. Furthermore, the purpose of the study was to extend the management students' competencies related to the sustainability marketing mix in the Polish context.

Design/methodology/approach

In this research, the quantitative approach was dominant. Firstly, the researcher developed hypothetical models based on the literature review to explore the phenomenon of the sustainability concept integration into the marketing curriculum and the students' competencies related to the sustainability marketing mix. Furthermore, the researcher used neo-institutional theory as a fundamental building block to explain the phenomenon. Accordingly, the phenomenon of integrating the sustainability concept into the marketing curriculum is identified as a dynamic of the organisational change process due to internal and external influences. At the same time, the students' competencies related to the sustainability marketing mix, embedded in the marketing curriculum, are identified as an output of the institutional change. The researcher collected primary data from the marketing faculty members from 16 Polish public universities to test the hypothetical model by applying a random sampling technique. The randomly selected sample consisted of 71 marketing faculty members. The researcher used SEM, including CFA, to explore the phenomenon. Secondly, the researcher explores the phenomena of the students' knowledge of the sustainability marketing mix and their skills related to the sustainability marketing mix, their knowledge of the sustainability marketing mix and their attitudes towards sustainability marketing mix, and their attitudes towards the sustainability marketing mix and their skills related to the sustainability marketing mix. Further, the researcher used SEM, including CFA, to explore the phenomena. Thirdly, the researcher tested the students' competencies in the sustainability marketing mix, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes among the selected 16 Polish public universities. The researcher used the H test to explore the said phenomena. Considering the second and third investigations, the researcher analysed randomly collected primary data from management students attached to the same universities. Moreover, the researchers tested the same scenarios on the first and second circle students. The sample size for the first circle of students was 380, and the sample size for the second circle of students was again 380.

The researcher used the survey method to collect the primary data from the population. The five-point Likert scale-based questionnaires were the data collection tool. After operationalising the variables, the researcher conducted the pilot study before moving into the primary data collection process. The survey was administered during the third quarter and the beginning of the

fourth quarter in 2025. The primary objective for the data collection was to collect empirical data to test the formulated 17 research hypotheses. Operationalisation related to testing the null hypotheses H₀₁, H₀₂, H₀₃, H₀₄, H₀₅, H₀₆, H₀₇, H₀₈, H₀₉, H₀₁₀, H₀₁₁, H₀₁₂, and H₀₁₃ was tested based on the primary data that was collected from the marketing faculty members from the 16 public universities. The research questionnaire was designed to gather data from the marketing faculty about students' knowledge, skills, and attitude components of the sustainability marketing mix that should be included in the first and second cycle sustainability marketing curricula. Operationalisation related to testing the null hypotheses H₀₁₄, H₀₁₅, H₀₁₆, and H₀₁₇ was tested based on the primary data that was collected from the management students from the 16 public universities. The research questionnaire was designed to gather data from management students about their knowledge, skills, and attitudes towards the sustainability marketing mix. The researcher used Microsoft Forms as a platform to administer the research questionnaires. All the statistical analysis was conducted using the R language. Microsoft Excel was used for data management, Microsoft Word for word processing, and Zotero for citation and management. The researcher followed the APA 7 editorial guidelines for scientific texts.

Findings

Based on the literature review, the researcher formulated 17 null hypotheses. All findings were based on testing these hypotheses. Accordingly, the researcher has sufficient statistical evidence not to reject any of the null hypotheses. The study's findings can be summarised as follows.

1. Sustainability concept integration into the marketing curriculum (SCIMC) as a dynamic of institutional change predicts the establishment of the sustainability-oriented marketing curriculum (FSCSMM) in the university context.
2. Faculty members' marketing competencies contribute to the latent construct of the sustainability concept integration into the marketing curriculum.
3. Faculty members' sustainability marketing competencies contribute to the latent construct of the sustainability concept integration into the marketing curriculum.

4. The university's sustainability policy contributes to the latent construct of the sustainability concept's integration into the marketing curriculum. However, the contribution is comparatively weak.
5. The labour market's demand for sustainability marketing competencies contributes to the latent construct of the sustainability concept integration into the marketing curriculum. However, the contribution is comparatively weak.
6. Marketing faculty members' current understandings of incorporating sustainability into the higher education curriculum contribute to the latent construct of the sustainability concept integration into the marketing curriculum. The contribution is significant.
7. Marketing faculty members' attitudes towards incorporating sustainability into the higher education curriculum contribute to the latent construct of the sustainability concept integration into the marketing curriculum. The contribution is significant.
8. Marketing faculty members' beliefs about incorporating sustainability into the higher education curriculum contribute to the latent construct of the sustainability concept integration into the marketing curriculum. The contribution is significant.
9. As a part of the curriculum, students' knowledge of the sustainability marketing mix contributes to the latent construct of students' competencies related to the sustainability marketing mix. The contribution is significant.
10. As a part of the curriculum, students' skills related to the sustainability marketing mix contribute to the latent construct of students' competencies related to the sustainability marketing mix. The contribution is significant.
11. As a part of the curriculum, students' attitudes towards the sustainability marketing mix contribute to the latent construct of students' competencies related to the sustainability marketing mix. The contribution is significant.
12. The students' knowledge of the sustainability marketing mix predicts the students' skills related to the sustainability marketing mix. The students' knowledge of the sustainability marketing mix also predicts the students' attitudes towards the sustainability marketing mix. The students' attitudes towards the sustainability mix predict the students' skills related to the sustainability marketing mix. (Both first and second circle students)

13. There is no difference in the first and second circle students' competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) related to the sustainability marketing mix among selected Polish public universities.

Research limitations

The study's primary limitation is that the results cannot be generalised beyond the research frame. Specifically, the 16 Polish public universities were considered for the data collection in the empirical phase. Moreover, the research study only focuses on the sustainability marketing mix. Therefore, the results do not provide information on other areas of sustainable marketing. When it comes to data collection, the duration is also significant. The primary data collection from the populations was administered during the third quarter and the beginning of the fourth quarter of 2025. The survey, thus, captures respondents' opinions at a specific moment, which means their opinions may change over time. The results should thus be viewed as time-dependent. Moreover, the CFA analysis encountered potential multicollinearity or redundancy issues among the factors. Furthermore, the analysis shows the possible model misspecification or sample size limitations.

Practical implications

The comprehensive sustainability marketing mix framework for curriculum development is the primary practical implication of the study. Regarding the sustainability-oriented marketing mix curriculum development, the marketing faculty members should consider the logical relationship between the knowledge, skills, and attitude components. The framework also explains the integration of the triple bottom line elements, including the planet, people, and profit, with each traditional marketing mix element, including product, price, place, and promotion. Thus, the proposed framework will be a helpful blueprint for marketing faculty members to guide themselves in developing a sustainability marketing mix curriculum for first and second circle studies.

Originality/value

The study aimed to explore the identified research gaps based on the latest literature and the empirical survey data collected during the third quarter and the beginning of the fourth quarter of 2025. At the same time, the study was unique to the Polish university context and sustainability-oriented marketing curriculum development. As an outcome of the empirical analysis, the study introduces the comprehensive sustainability marketing mix framework for curriculum development. Moreover, the study can serve as a fundamental research project to investigate the same phenomena in another country. Due to the study's repeatability, any interested researcher would consider the same variables and conduct the empirical analysis to explore the phenomena in another country's context.

Keywords: *The Neo-institutional theory, the concept of sustainability, the sustainability-oriented marketing curriculum, the sustainability marketing mix framework, management students' competencies related to the sustainability marketing mix, Polish public universities.*